

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2480

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

S E C R E T TEHRAN 3746

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, IR, LE

SUBJECT: FORMER LEBANESE PRESIDENT DOUBTS LEBANON COULD

SURVIVE A REAL CONFRONTATION WITH FEDAYEEN

REF: A) TEHRAN 3660 (NOTAL); B) TEHRAN 3697 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY FORMER LEBANESE PRESIDENT CAMILLE CHAMOUN STATES, THAT LEBANON COULD NOT SURVIVE A JORDANIAN STYLE CONFRONTATION WITH THE FEDAYEEN. HE QUOTES, APPARENTLY APPROVINGLY, ESTIMATES THAT HIS COUNTRY NEEDS AT LEAST THREE DIVISIONS TO MAINTAIN THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON IN A SITUATION IT CAN LIVE WITH. END SUMMARY

1. DURING MAY 29 DINNER PARTY OF KUWAITI AMBASSADOR TO TEHRAN AL- SABAH, I HAD PERHAPS SIGNIFICANT CONVERSATION WITH FORMER LEBANESE PRESIDENT CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND LEBANESE AMBASSADOR TO TEHRAN KHALIL AL- KHALIL CONCERNING LATEST CRISIS BETWEEN FEDAYEEN AND GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON. KHALIL HOPED THAT UNITED STATES WOULD ASSIST LEBANON MILITARILY ALONG LINES MENTIONED TO ME BY COURT MINISTER ALAM, FOLLOWING URGENT REQUEST FROM PRESIDENT OF LEBANON CONVEYED BY CHAMOUN (REFTEL A). HE ALSO STATED THAT HIS COUNTRY WOULD NEED AMERICAN FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

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2. GIVING NO SIGN THAT HE WAS IN ANYWAY INVOLVED IN LEBANESE ARMS REQUEST, CHAMOUN VOLUNTEERED TO ME THAT HE SAW NO WAY FOR LEBANON TO SURVIVE AN ALL OUT CONFRONTATION WITH THE FEDAYEEN SUCH AS HAD OCCURRED IN JORDAN IN SEPTEMBER 1970. THE OUTCOME OF THE LATEST CRISIS IN HIS COUNTRY INVOLVING ONLY RELATIVELY LIGHT HOSTILITIES HAD BEEN AMBIGUOUS. THE CONFESSIONAL DIVISIONS AND OVERALL STRUCTURE OF LEBANESE SOCIETY WERE SUCH THAT FULL SCALE FIGHTING BETWEEN THE FEDAYEEN AND THE LEBANESE ARMED FORCES WOULD DESTROY THE COUNTRY. CHAMOUN SPOKE WITH APPARENT CONVICTION.

3. FORMER PRESIDENT WENT ON TO SAY THAT THERE WERE BETWEEN 300,000 AND 4000,000 PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON. OF THESE AT LEAST 30,000 WERE ARMED, INCLUDING BETWEEN 5,000 AND 6,000 TOUGH, TRAINED GUERRILLAS. THE LEBANESE MILITARY COMMAND HAD ESTIMATED THAT LEBANON WOULD NEED AT LEAST THREE DIVISIONS OF TROOPS TO BE SURE OF MAINTAINING THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON IN A SITUATION WITH WHICH IT COULD LIVE. WHAT WAS MOST NEEDED WERE LONG RANGE GUNS. SYRIANS WERE CURRENTLY IN A POSITION TO FIRE ACROSS BORDER INTO LEBANON AND LEBANON NEEDED TO BE ABLE TO FIRE BACK.

4. VISITING LEBANESE STATESMAN CONCLUDED HIS DISCOURSE BY SAYING THAT LEBANON WAS ONLY DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD. HE BELIEVE IT WAS WELL WORTH THE UNITED STATES' SUPPORT.

COMMENT: WHAT CHAMOUN SEEMS TO BE SAYING IS THAT LEBANON REQUIRES A VERY LARGE EXPANSION OF ITS MILITARY FORCES, NOT FOR PURPOSES OF ANY ALL OUT BASH AT THE FEDAYEE -- WHICH HE WOULD VIEW AS A DISASTROUS EVENTUALITY -- BUT FOR THE MORE MODEST AIM OF SIMPLY HOLDING HIS COUNTRY TOGETHER. BEIRUT WILL BE IN A BETTER POSITION THAN WE TO SAY WHETHER AS A TOUGH OLD VETERAN OF THE 1958 FIGHTING IN LEBANON, CHAMOUN IS ACCURATELY REFLECTING THE VIEWS OF PRESIDENT FRANGIE.
HELMS

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